



**Missoula Urban Transportation District
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2023**

APPROVED MAY 10, 2023

Members Present

Don MacArthur, Chair
Jesse Dodson
Amy Cilimburg
Sebastian Strauss

Members Absent

Jason Wiener
Andrea Davis

Staff

Jennifer Sweten, Ops Dir.
Colin Woodrow, Plan. & Proj Mgr.
Dan Stone, Transit Planner
Vince Caristo, Procur. Spec.
Michele Erickson, Admin. Assist.
Olga Kreimer, Comm Spec.

Guests

None

Call to Order and Roll Call

Don MacArthur called the meeting to order at 11:01 AM. Roll call was taken.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda

None

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None

Action Items

4.1 Approve the Minutes of February 8, 2023

Cilimburg made a motion to approve the minutes of February 8, 2023. Strauss seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion items

5.1 Service Reduction

Sweten presented to the committee that there will need to be a service reduction from April 16th through the summer months. Sweten explained that this is due to the inability to find enough Operators and to lessen the strain on the current workforce. The routes impacted by the service reduction are Route 1 and Route 2, which will run every 20 minutes rather than 15 minutes, and Route 8 and Route 12 will run every 60 minutes rather than every 30 minutes. Due to the need

for more quality new hires and issues with the retention of workers, the agency felt this move was necessary. MacArthur questioned why there are issues with employee retention. Sweten responded that some problems can arise during training or the inability to work the scheduled hours. In addition, there is a lack of quality of life due to Union Seniority provisions. All of which have driven employees out in less than a year. Cilimburg suggested connecting with the University of Montana about their UDASH bus drivers to work for the agency during those summer months. Sweten agreed that could be a possibility and would look further into that. Strauss suggested introducing more incentives to help encourage new prospective applicants and motivate current employees to remain. The group discussed incentives such as childcare or childcare payments, snacks available during difficult shift times, and working with the Union to help those on the lower levels of Seniority have a better quality of life at the agency. MacArthur was concerned about the public response to the limited frequency since we were supposed to be expanding. Sweten agreed that it is not optimal but necessary with our current workforce. Sweten also proposed using this as a recruitment tool by informing the public of our workforce needs.

5.2 Track It Transit 11:33 AM

Sweten began by introducing the back story of the need for extensive tracking done in Operations such as vehicle inspections, maintenance inspections, etc. Currently, the agency uses Excel to track all the needs in Operations. During an APTA meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, last year, Sweten was introduced to the Track It Transit SMS Software. Fellow transit companies explained the seamlessness of tracking accidents and the ability of the system to auto-populate the employee's need for more training and go another step further by scheduling that training. Caristo added that Track It Transit has many modules that can be utilized in Operations. It can drastically reduce the amount of paperwork that is necessary and, most importantly, minimize errors. The cost of the software service is \$14,000/year. The price does not increase if you begin to utilize more modules. Strauss asked if this would save money on the amount the agency pays employees to keep using the Excel spreadsheets. Sweten responded that the agency had not looked too far into how much money could be potentially saved but rather how it could increase the accuracy of Operations. Track It Transit is the industry leader. Sweten did call around to other transit companies for their review of the use of Track It Transit, which resulted in only positive feedback.

5.3 ERP Project Overview 11:41 AM

Caristo spoke about the need for new software for the agency. The Finance, Human Resources, and Projects and Procurement software needs to be updated and more efficient. Caristo recommends an ERP software that would work with those departments to enhance workflow, save time and money, improve accuracy, and regain employee satisfaction. Caristo explains that this will likely be a significant investment for Mountain Line. To get the best software for the agency's needs, Caristo discussed the need for the assistance of an outside contractor to guide the agency toward the appropriate ERP software. The contractor would aid in defining Mountain Line's needs and goals and assemble an RFP (request for proposals). The cost for a consultant would range between \$50,000 and \$70,000. The agency is interviewing companies and should have an RFP for services for the Board to review by June. Implementing the new software would take 6 to 12 months and is projected to cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million. MacArthur was concerned if the software was a one-time fee or a subscription-based contract. Caristo responded that the cost would probably include start-up and a 3 to 5-year contract subscription. MacArthur asked the committee to consider whether it would be better to invest in more employees than a new software program. Caristo responded that as the agency works with a contractor looking over the best software programs for the agency, they can also plan to look at the cost of software investment versus investing in more people. The discussion then began in the group on the various departments affected and the complex nature of getting software needed to exact positive change throughout the agency. Woodrow expressed strong support for ERP software and the

need for assistance in implementing a new software program. The agency currently has only one IT Specialist, Jason Blodgett, while other companies may have an entire team of IT Specialists that can implement new software. MacArthur supports having consultants aid in the software implementation but would like the agency to be wary of companies tied to a specific vendor.

5.4 On-Demand Transit 12:03 PM

Caristo informed the Board about the RFP currently out for a consultant to survey the feasibility of on-demand transit. Proposals were due by February 23rd, with approval for the RFP by the Board in March. The project must be completed by the end of the year, so the consultants will need to have the results back by September. The study aims to specifically explore areas not served directly by fixed route services or have a low frequency of service. The four areas the study will consider are Grant Creek, Target Ranch, Mullan Rd area, and Linda Vista area. The goals defined for the study are to assess the potential to:

- Increase geographic coverage,
- Expand overall hours of service,
- Increase ridership,
- Improve customer satisfaction,
- Increase productivity (cost per trip)
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The study would help identify whether on-demand transit services are appropriate for the area. Part of the study will include asking the chosen consultants to review five other areas comparable to Missoula, Montana, and how they have utilized on-demand transit. The study should also provide an operational outline for what transit could be, how it would work, and where it would fit best. The expectation is that the study's conceptualization would lead to implementation if the results were favorable. Finally, there will be a financial plan and a recommended set of performance measurements to evaluate and track the project.

Caristo reviewed that certain changes were considered with the language but that the RFP was primarily released as it was presented to the Board initially. Three firms reached out with bids:

1. Nelson Nygaard
2. VIA
3. Liftango

All firms are aware of the fixed budget of \$75,000 and the tight completion timetable by the end of the year. All three firms have no issues with the project parameters. The agency will bring its recommendation to the Board once they have chosen an RFP.

Strauss had a question outside the discussion of On-Demand Transit. He wanted clarification on the agency's process in determining what types of bus stop to build in certain areas. Strauss used the example of the VA Clinic not having a stop and then suddenly the agency putting a stop on Mary Jane Boulevard. Woodrow clarified that Mountain Line worked with IMEG to put together a cost estimate for a stop out front of the VA Clinic, and the VA refused to provide any funding for any stop. The agency is looking to the Senator's office to help move this forward to serve the Veterans of Missoula better. Sweten emphasized that this is an example of how many unique stops around Missoula need to be served and funded, with safety and run cuts being considered.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 PM.

Submitted by Michele Erickson